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Affects of Resistance: Indignation, Emulation, Fellowship

DAN TAYLOR

A turn to the affects has been well underway in the critical humanities over the last two decades. Work on ‘affective labour’ or even the ‘affects of capitalism’ is now ubiquitous,¹ as the feelings and expressions of individuals in late capitalism have become politicised, undermining a veneer of common participation and consent in the operations of capital. Concepts like ‘capitalist realism’ (Mark Fisher), ‘cruel optimism’ (Lauren Berlant) or ‘emotional labour’ (Arlie Russell Hochschild) have refocused political attention to the inner states of subjectivity, self-expression and relationality.² Amid rising right-wing populist electoral breakthroughs globally, William Davies is among many in his recent argument that

¹ E.g. Bruno Latour, ‘On Some of the Affects of Capitalism’. Lecture Given at the Royal Academy, Copenhagen, 26th February 2014. <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/136-AFFECTS-OF-K-COPENHAGUE.pdf> [URL accessed 30.10.18]

² Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (Winchester: Zero, 2009); Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2011); Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

‘feelings have taken over the world’, particularly pain, fear and anger. They have become gravitational centres for new political formations, often at the expense of existing centrist parties, in which the individual can ‘become (and feel) part of something much larger than themselves’.³ While undoubtedly not new phenomena, the political significance of emotion and feeling in new democratic movements has been heightened in a reportedly ‘post-truth’ era.

Affect is more than mere emotion, and readings in affect theory (an admittedly broad and not-all-ecumenical church) define this slippery subject as that which exceeds representation, conscious intentionality, or the sign. Affect instead is that which is embodied, and through being embodied, points to our fundamental situatedness or ‘in-between-ness’ in an interrelational, often interdependent world of forces and bodily encounters.⁴ That said, work of the affective turn has often rested upon some questionable theoretical assumptions. There has been a tendency to identify and endorse a liberatory potential in a given affect itself – be it ‘radical happiness’ (Lynne Segal), political ‘love’ (Martha Nussbaum), or communist ‘desire’ (Jodi Dean) – as if these affective states were somehow inherently or universally empowering for more than a small number of like-minded people.⁵ Love, desire or joy does not always have a normatively beneficent character. It also presupposes a pre-individuated affective state that exists prior to or separate from mental representation – a criticism one can make of Brian Massumi’s claim that affect is ‘autonomous’ from linguistic signification in his influential essay, ‘The Autonomy of Affect’

³ William Davies, *Nervous States* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018), p. 7.

⁴ For a good introduction to the field, see Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Greig, ‘An Inventory of Shimmers’, in their co-edited *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1-9.

⁵ Lynne Segal, *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy* (London: Verso, 2017); Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London: Verso, 2012), ch. 5.

(1995).⁶ What is an affect if not a certain idea of a bodily state? To propose that affects exist separately to mental or symbolic representations assumes an epistemology that rests on something akin to depth psychology that itself requires further explanation. Likewise, in political theory the affect of indignation has been heralded, not without justification, as the central affect of political resistance and protest, a move reflected in the new protest movements after 2010 like the *Indignados* in Spain and *Aganaktismenoi* ('Outraged') in Greece.⁷ While work has rightly explored the collectivising ethos of such common affects, it remains unclear how different orders of indignation, joy, desire, or love might be understood through their effects on the mobilisation of social and political movements. In other words, what distinguishes the indignation or joy of a reactionary or fascist grouping from a socially progressive or revolutionary one?

The language of affects can be traced through a direct lineage to the philosopher Benedictus de Spinoza, who considered these elementary states to be not merely the external expressions of inner feelings, as emotions might be defined today, but as manifestations of an individual's power. This reception of affects in Spinoza has occurred indirectly, particularly through Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) and its English translation by Massumi (1987), whose subsequent work develops the broad applicability of the affects in critical thought.⁸ For Spinoza, joyous affects correspond to an increase in the body's power of acting, and sad affects to a diminution in this power, providing a materialist basis for understanding affects in terms of power

⁶ Brian Massumi, 'The Autonomy of Affect', *Cultural Critique*, 31 (1995), p. 96. For a critique of his distinction between mind and body, see Ruth Leys, 'The Turn to Affect: A Critique', *Critical Inquiry*, 37.3 (2011), pp. 434-437, 449-452.

⁷ Marina Prentoulis and Lasse Thomassen, 'Political Theory in the Square: Protest, Representation and Subjectification', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 12.3 (2013), pp. 166-184.

⁸ 'Autonomy of Affect', pp. 83-110; *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

and activity.⁹

We can map out an attempt to theorise a pre-Hegelian, non-dialectical collective subject of resistance and revolution in Deleuze's earlier, incisive studies on Spinoza, Antonio Negri's *Savage Anomaly* and Mark Fisher's later attempts to derive a Spinozan politics for the contemporary era.¹⁰ While this work has had an almost exclusive focus on the *Ethics*, Spinoza's political writings, and in particular his final, underassessed *Political Treatise*, also treat the political affects as the elementary problem of politics. They provide a theoretical outline of how political movements can mobilise around a given affect, while simultaneously evincing a disdain, if not outright 'fear',¹¹ of the social instability such movements might also cause. This marks a tension in Spinoza's work, where sedition and rebellion are presented as problems for the state's security while political transformation and revolution are presented as necessities.

This article commences from this tension, proceeding to evaluate and resituate an understanding of political affects within the context of these debates. Just as Spinoza famously remarked that 'no one has yet

⁹ E3p11s. Spinoza referencing used: E = *Ethics*; TTP = *Theological-Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*); TP = *Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Politicus*). References to TTP and TP indicate chapter number followed by section. References to *Ethics* follow standard format: ad = definition of the affects, end of Part 3; app = appendix; c = corollary; p = proposition; pref = preface; s = scholium. E.g. E4p37s2 refers to *Ethics* Part 4, proposition 37, second scholium. Editions used: Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza. Volumes I-II*, trans. and ed. by Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, 2016).

¹⁰ Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Zone, 1990 [1968]); *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. by Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988 [1970]); Antonio Negri, *Savage Anomaly*, trans. by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003 [1981]); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press: MIT, 2000); Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, ch. 9.

¹¹ Étienne Balibar describes a double-edged 'fear of the masses' in an eponymous essay in *Masses, Classes and Ideas*, trans. by James Swenson (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 27.

determined what a body can do',¹² so this paper asks whether we have yet determined what an affect can do – politically, at least. With an eye on recent populist and anti-capitalist protests, this paper rereads Spinoza on the political affects to argue that resistance should shift from an affect of indignation to one of emulation. Such a shift involves cultivating forms of collective life that foster what Mark Fisher called 'fellowship',¹³ 'positive depersonalisation' and 'consciousness raising'.¹⁴ This work can result in a collective joy, but is by no means simple, given the inherent and lasting challenges of power dynamics along lines of gender, race or class facing leftist and progressive organisations. Its structure is as follows: Part 1 evaluates indignation, the primary affect of resistance; Part 2 critiques a view of revolution as transcendental; Part 3 proposes an argument for collective power using the imitative affect of emulation; and Part 4 uses Fisher's concept of 'positive depersonalisation' to consider an alternative trajectory out of political quietism and 'Left melancholia', towards an ethics of desire that can fulfil the needs of individual and collective freedom.

1. Indignation

How should the citizens of a state respond to a sovereign whose rule threatens their own lives and the common good of the state? While Spinoza often quoted Seneca that 'no-one has maintained a violent regime for long', in the TTP he repeatedly warns against would-be 'agitators and rebels' disobeying existing laws or defying the instructions of the sovereign, insisting that it 'very rarely happens' that sovereigns make absurd commands.¹⁵ In the *Ethics*, that which brings 'discord to the state' is

¹² E3p2s.

¹³ Mark Fisher, 'Acid Communism', in *k-punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher*, ed. Darren Ambrose (London: Repeater, 2018), p. 763.

¹⁴ Mark Fisher, 'Abandon hope (summer is coming)', *k-punk*, 11th May 2015. <http://k-punk.org/abandon-hope-summer-is-coming> [URL accessed 30.10.18]

¹⁵ TTP 20.7; 16.9; cf. TTP 17 *passim* on 'sedition'.

considered evil, and the free individual, guided by reason, desires to adhere to and ‘keep the common laws of the state’.¹⁶ The TP asserts similarly that ‘the more a man is led by reason ... the more steadfastly he will observe the laws of the commonwealth and carry out the commands of the supreme power to whom he is subject’.¹⁷ Spinoza was writing in a context in which the insurrectionaries were pro-Orangist Calvinists opposed to the relative liberal pluralism of the Dutch Republic. Yet his repeated appeals to ‘prudence’ in politics indicate the double-edged nature of political protest, resistance and revolt. ‘[H]ow imprudent many people are to try to remove a tyrant from their midst’, he writes in the TP, ‘when they can’t remove the causes of the prince’s being a tyrant’.¹⁸ This expands on an underdeveloped observation in the TTP on the ‘imprudence’ of parliamentarians during the English Civil War: they failed because they did not ‘change their form of state’, and so exchanged King Charles for King Oliver.¹⁹ Unless the institutional and cultural forms that produce monarchy and monarchical obedience are fundamentally transformed, they will continue to perpetuate themselves. Hannah Arendt concisely articulates the stakes of this problem: ‘revolutions are more than successful insurrections’.²⁰ Already then, our discussion faces two problems: the possibility and difficulty of changing the political sovereign or form of the state, and the life-in-common of political affects. To address these, let’s turn to a small number of Marxist readings that have politicised indignation in Spinoza to explore the conditions for successful revolutions.

When ‘disagreements and rebellions are stirred up in a commonwealth’, writes Spinoza in the TP, the ‘result is never that the citizens dissolve the commonwealth’, but instead ‘they change its form to another’.²¹ Highlighting this passage, Filippo Del Lucchese notes that for

¹⁶ E4p40; E4p73.

¹⁷ TP 3.6.

¹⁸ TP 5.7.

¹⁹ TTP 18.8.

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1965), p. 24.

²¹ TP 6.2.

Spinoza the state is the natural association that all human beings gravitate towards for the purpose of self-preservation, whether driven by reason or passive affects.²² By implication then, discord and sedition are the means by which a state's form is changed. Whereas conflict in a state was imprudent and to be avoided at all costs in the TTP, it now becomes 'an ineradicable element of its physiology'.²³ Finding itself subject to forces of authoritarian control that seek to diminish and divide its collective strength, the multitude experiences 'the affect of *indignatio*' as a 'drive and capacity for resistance'.²⁴ Political repression thereby becomes constitutive of the 'life in common', the first shared affect of the multitude.

Warren Montag also observes the significance of indignation for a revolutionary politics in Spinoza. In a discussion of another part of the TP, he also asserts that 'a state does not have the right to do that which will bring about the indignation of the majority', as otherwise it will collapse.²⁵ Yet both commentators leave these observations tantalisingly underdeveloped, and allude only in passing to the work of Alexandre Matheron,²⁶ where this politicised indignation finds its fullest expression. Indignation is an affect that begins in the imagination, being 'hatred towards him who has done evil to another',²⁷ and related to pity, both requiring a judgement that the subjected party is 'like us', of a common nature. Matheron then departs from Spinoza's own argumentation by asserting that it is also an imitative affect, that is, one whose joy or sadness

²² Filippo Del Lucchese, *Conflict, Power, and Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza. Tumult and Indignation*. (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 78-79.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60. Affects of resistance are those that determine the subject to a position of political resistance.

²⁵ Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and his Contemporaries* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 66, discussing TP 3.9.

²⁶ Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Minuit, 1988), pp. 416-7; 'L'indignation et le conatus de l'Etat spinoziste', in M. Revault D'Allones, H. Rizk (eds.), *Spinoza: Puissance et ontologie* (Paris: Kime, 1994), pp. 153-165.

²⁷ E3p22s.

is increased when we see another we judge of a common nature being affected by joy or sadness.²⁸ For Matheron, when we imagine someone affecting a beloved object with sadness, ‘we shall be affected with hate towards him’.²⁹ He then applies this to an individual living under a tyrant. The tyrant will necessarily be hated because they rule by fear, which causes sadness, and as ‘hatred is nothing but sadness accompanied by its external cause’, the subject’s fear leads to hatred, outrage, and collective indignation on the streets.

There are two textual problems facing this argument that will be returned to in Part 3.³⁰ What Matheron develops with the argument is most interesting. Why do subjects not work together to attack and overthrow the hated tyrant, given the fear it produces in them? ‘[I]f the subjects abstain, it is only to the extent that one or several amongst them, because they feel isolated, has no hope of achieving it’.³¹ If a tyranny can prevent individuals from recognising their common nature and grievances, disaggregating their collective power into isolated individual units, then it can reduce instances of collective rebellion. However, when the tyrant steals, kills and destroys on a large scale,³² many become disempowered and filled with hatred and soon cannot help but recognise each other’s suffering. By affective imitation, their indignation and hatred are collectively multiplied, and ‘each perceives their hatred is universally shared’. In a process akin to the ‘social contract’, they all ‘naturally coalesce’ and with ‘a union made of force’, their indignation becomes a collective power, and insurrection now has ‘the greatest chance of success’. The tyrant can then either grant concessions that persuade the indignant subjects to reinvest their right in its authority, or continue its violence against the subjects, with the

²⁸ Matheron, *Individu*, p. 156; cf. E3p27-p28, 3p34, 3p40, 3ad30, 4app14.

²⁹ *Ibid.*; E3p27c1.

³⁰ These concern fear and the intrinsic weakness of sad passive affects. Nor is indignation an imitative affect in Spinoza’s analysis, contra Matheron.

³¹ Matheron, *Individu*, p. 416.

³² E.g. Nero’s Rome, TP 4.4.

subsequent collapse of the state into war.³³

Indignation therefore becomes the first common political affect, one in which the abused multitude share in each other's hatred and attempt to revenge themselves on their oppressor. For Matheron, it also has a regulative social function wherein the multitude's 'collective conatus' is realised through an affect that attempts to purge the state of a defective authority.³⁴ Laurent Bove also uses this collective conatus concept to describe the multitude and resistance.³⁵ He deepens Matheron's account of indignation by conceiving of it as one of two 'affects of resistance', that alongside benevolence, 'the desire to benefit one whom we pity',³⁶ constitute the two affective keys of political life. Natural oscillations between oppression and resistance function to ensure a dynamic equilibrium in social life and are the very process of its 'self-management',³⁷ with resistance to the civil power being an essential property of the citizen. This account of indignation still tends to regard politics in a way that is too *sub specie aeternitatis* however. What is to ensure an indignant multitude succeed in effectively transforming the state altogether so that one tyrant isn't merely replaced with another, or that collective indignation coheres around socially progressive and rational objectives (i.e. democratic, egalitarian) over reactive and xenophobic ones?

For Matheron, there is a 'democratic conatus' that the multitude share in through their interdependent relations, a dynamic and continually renewed consensus wherein all naturally seek their empowerment through

³³ Matheron, *Individu*, pp. 416-417.

³⁴ Matheron, 'L'indignation et le conatus de l'Etat spinoziste', pp. 161-164;

³⁵ Laurent Bove, *La stratégie du conatus: affirmation et résistance chez Spinoza* (Paris: Vrin, 1996), p. 257.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 291-5; cf. E3ad35.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

the state,³⁸ whatever form its placeholder takes. But without sufficient capability, this multitude could just as easily fight for the authorities which subjugate it. The liberation Matheron envisions this elusive democratic conatus resulting in takes place only at the rarefied level of the mind(s). At the end of *Individu et communauté* he outlines a remarkable vision of a ‘communism of minds’.³⁹ Alongside pursuing generosity, prudence, gratitude, and obedience to the civil laws – the ‘mundane’ but socially necessary activities that reproduce the bourgeois liberal state – the philosopher actively works to ‘enable all of Humanity to exist as a totality conscious of itself, a microcosm of the infinite Understanding, in the heart of which every soul, although remaining itself, would at the same time become all the others’. This communism of minds seeks to raise the entire human race to the level of collective self-awareness, with neither ‘juridical laws nor institutional constraints’,⁴⁰ thereby seeing the total withering away of the state and a full ‘communism of goods’. Knowledge of the third kind *is* collective, he indicates, because of its eternity and universality. Our collective awareness multiplies our knowledge of ourselves as individuals, and as interdependent members of a collective. In the process it surpasses ‘all alienations and divergences’ on an affective level, as individuals come to recognise each other adequately as things of an ‘interhuman’ and common nature.⁴¹

Matheron concludes that it also indicates the most complete liberation of the human mind alluded to by Spinoza, one that necessarily takes place on the collective level, ‘a *complete and definitive* individual liberation in a community *without restriction*’. In a shared collective consciousness, a communism of minds, the individual overcomes the ‘ultimate servitude’, death. Matheron concedes that the communism of minds exists as an ideal

³⁸ Alexandre Matheron, ‘The Theoretical Function of Democracy in Spinoza and Hobbes’, trans. by Ted Stolze, in *The New Spinoza*, ed. by Montag and Stolze (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 217.

³⁹ Matheron, *Individu*, p. 612.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 612, n95.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 613.

which humanity works towards without achieving, akin to the exemplar of the ‘free man’ in the *Ethics* Part 4. It functions ‘as a regulative Idea in the Kantian sense’,⁴² in that like Kant’s God, immortality and free will in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the communism of minds does not constitute theoretical knowledge itself, but instead regulates and guides our thought and action towards an ideal limit.

It is one of the most beautiful interpretations of the politically liberatory Spinoza, and one can agree with Ted Stolze that the Anglophone world has been so far cheated of Matheron’s remarkable scholarship, which still lacks systematic translation.⁴³ Yet while effectively re-positioning collectivity as the focus of Spinoza’s liberatory project, Matheron’s journey towards this ideal limit is still unclear. In a recent insightful study, Gerald Gaus warns against any transcendental ideal of perfect justice. Too often, this subjective idealism leads to unviable and unenviable monolithic social structures which others will disagree with, and which encourage us to postpone challenging present, minor injustices for the ‘mere dreaming’ of distant utopias.⁴⁴ Echoing Amartya Sen, a certain loose pluralism of ideas about justice is best for societal harmony, reflecting an inherently conflicting plurality of views. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel presented a similar view in his critique of the ‘law of the heart’ in Rousseau, which believes that the world is inherently rational, once people listen to their hearts over repressive external authority.⁴⁵ Such a projection of ideals inevitably results in disappointment, as the agent’s revolutionary idealism fails to find agreement with others, or its political programme viable, resulting in an inevitable negation of other individuals’ freedoms as crude

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 612 n95.

⁴³ Ted Stolze, ‘Revisiting a Marxist encounter with Spinoza: Alexandre Matheron on Militant Reason and Intellectual Love of God’, *Crisis and Critique*, 2.1 (2015), p. 153.

⁴⁴ Gerald Gaus, *The Tyranny of the Ideal: Justice in a Diverse Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 16.

⁴⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), §372.

self-interest is taken to be the secret truth of the world in the ‘frenzy of self-conceit’.⁴⁶ The individual’s liberation and ascension into a communism of minds may be possible for individuals or possibly even small groups, but what of the majority of humanity, rendered passive by poverty, ignorance and state violence?

Here one of Matheron’s most attentive readers, Stolze, helps expand the account. If indignation against oppression is the ‘first affective moment of resistance’,⁴⁷ it remains insufficiently destabilising of the state’s power and, as Bove indicates, merely renews its self-management. He then draws attention to a second affective moment of resistance, ‘glory’ which, like Bove’s account of benevolence, enables a passive multitude to act more powerfully by imagining another praising their actions, and so behaving in ways worthy of esteem.⁴⁸ However this is also found to be unstable, as individuals experiencing glory do not necessarily produce socially useful actions. ‘Militants’ (or anyone involved in political struggle) must therefore strive towards a third affective moment of resistance, ‘fortitude’, and its accompanying active affects of courage and generosity.⁴⁹ Courage and generosity are reciprocal, binding people together in mutually useful relationships while enabling them to overcome sad passive affects like fear. Stolze then outlines an affective therapy for militants using E5p10s, where Spinoza issues in mnemonic form his ethical rules for living by directing us to understand the causes of the affects. By understanding the causes of indignation and glory in political oppression and disempowerment, militants can thereby strengthen ‘the affect of generosity through reflection on the usefulness of social solidarity’.⁵⁰

Such an ethics of fortitude thereby serves two uses: it enables those

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, §379.

⁴⁷ Ted Stolze, ‘An Ethics for Marxism: Spinoza on Fortitude’, *Rethinking Marxism*, 26.4 (2014), p. 567.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 569-71.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 574.

involved in a political struggle to recognise that there can be ‘no successful collective emancipation without the widespread participation of courageous and generous individuals’, and so by implication, that they should strive to enable as many as possible to become as courageous and generous as they can be.⁵¹ Secondly, it identifies the ‘internal struggle’ of ethical practice as essential alongside concrete political analysis – fortitude and ‘serenity of mind’ can preserve intact the militant and their politics in a desperate political conjuncture long after indignation, vainglory and other passive affects lead to group burnout.

Both Matheron’s communism of minds and Stolze’s militant fortitude make great progress in transposing Spinoza’s ethics to political struggles, beyond those vague affirmations of joy and multitudinal power that have dogged leftist work in this area. Yet neither bridge the link between the individual’s affective empowerment and self-knowledge and that fostered with small sympathetic affinity groups, with the wider social movements that cause tyrants to fall and states to change their form. Matheron’s description of indignation supposes a kind of naturalistic probability that others will recognise each other’s suffering, but this doesn’t account for the prejudices and superstition to which humanity is naturally prone, according to the TTP, and which result in popular servitude and the passive tolerance of inequality. Nor does a difficult-to-attain collective fortitude explain how resistance begins in the first place, before it can be sustained. Two problems remain: how individuals are able (or enabled) to recognise their common grievance, a problem of ideology and hegemony; and how solidarity becomes sufficiently established such that the indignant can maintain their collective activity together (in contrast to merely cultivating a resilient *fortitudo* individually) against the violent forces of the tyrant.

2. The Revolution will not be Transcendental

The following section is dedicated to this problem, but there is a niggling tendency in Matheron and Stolze that is also found in other theorists of

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 576-77.

political resistance. This is the elevation of revolution to transcendence, such that communism or equivalent liberatory egalitarian politico-economic forms become an ‘ideal’ or ‘regulative Idea’ that thought and action are directed towards without ever reaching. Jodi Dean presents communism as a ‘horizon’ that is ‘Real in the sense of *impossible* – we can never reach it’.⁵² For Bruno Bosteels, it is a politics ‘without actuality’, but one that conditions such an actuality, a reading he traces back to Sartre.⁵³ Alain Badiou similarly has presented communism as an idea possessing universal and emancipatory truth, one that is produced through events whose truth procedure consists in being founded on egalitarian axioms to which subjects must remain faithful.⁵⁴ For Fredric Jameson, ‘collective desire’ is the material that supplies the ‘content of Utopian form’, if it is not to be found in the ‘half-forgotten trace of the experience of peasant solidarity and collectivity’.⁵⁵ Even Álvaro García Linera, vice-president of Bolivia’s socialist government since 2006, describes communism both as ‘the general horizon of the era’ and yet not an ‘immediate’ one,⁵⁶ one whose promise is heralded, then postponed. Granted, Marx and Engels already spell out this problem in the *German Ideology*, which warns against setting up some ‘ideal’ or pragmatic ‘state of affairs’, in favour of a communism as ‘the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things’.⁵⁷ But something of the activity of the verb *abolish* is lost in this talk. It is reminiscent of Kafka’s parable ‘Before the law’, that such a political transformation is ‘possible... but not at the moment’.⁵⁸

⁵² Dean, *Communist Horizon*, p. 2.

⁵³ Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* (London: Verso, 2011), p. 228.

⁵⁴ Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. by Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 52-4.

⁵⁵ Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 85.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Bosteels, *Actuality of Communism*, pp. 226-27.

⁵⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus, 1998), p. 57

⁵⁸ Franz Kafka, ‘Before the Law’, in *The Complete Short Stories*, ed. by N.N. Glatzer, trans. by Willa and Edwin Muir (London: Vintage, 2005), p. 3.

While there is something pragmatic in conceding the present unlikelihood of international communism, Mark Fisher has rightly criticised the dangers of empty utopianism on the Left. Such positions are the ‘flipside of capitalist realism’ in accepting the impossibility of the ‘realistic’ or ‘realisable’ demands of socialist visions.⁵⁹ In place of ‘luxury communism’ – a concept initially developed in Judy Thorne’s work, and subsequently by Aaron Bastani and others at Novara Media – Fisher proposed a ‘communist realism’. It would be concerned with remoulding what he considered in his later, unfinished *Acid Communism* as an inherently ‘plastic’, mutable desire, one that sought to luxuriate in free time and fellowship, realised through collective joy and shared consciousness-raising against the ‘mandatory individualism’ of contemporary capitalism.⁶⁰ Utopian visions by contrast inadvertently reframe the realism of contemporary defeat, and prevent others from making something of their indignation. Raising revolution to such an ethereal plane devalues everyday struggles in the home or workplace, in actual or virtual public places, or at local or national government level. Here bonds of solidarity can be formed, sad passive affects checked and overcome with joyous ones, if not active ones, and individual and collective behaviours can be transformed *at least in part* so as to increase the intellectual and physical powers of others. These forms of individual and collective empowerment do matter and should not be discounted as mere lifestyle politics or reformism.

To discount the importance of everyday ‘folk’ political struggles is to fall into the trap of what Wendy Brown calls ‘Left melancholia’,⁶¹ abandoning the initial premises of actual collective empowerment and retreating into a rarefied ideal, possible sometime after the end of history. In Freud’s well-known account, melancholia is defined as the loss of a

⁵⁹ ‘Luxury Communism: A Conversation between Mark Fisher and Judy Thorne’ in *Futures and Fictions*, ed. by Henriette Gunkel, Ayesha Hameed and Simon O’Sullivan (London: Repeater, 2017), p. 160.

⁶⁰ Fisher, ‘Acid Communism’, pp. 757, 763.

⁶¹ Wendy Brown, ‘Resisting Left Melancholia’, *boundary 2*, 26.3 (1999), pp. 19-27.

loved object, whose loss the individual mitigates by narcissistically identifying with its own ego and internalising it as its very subjectivity (or *ethos*). ‘In this way an object loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification’.⁶² Anger against the lost object is directed at the ego itself, leading to debilitating depression and inaction, interrupted by occasional bursts of splenetic re-commitment to the loved object. The means of resolving the conflict would be to recognise and grieve the lost object, international socialism and its revolutionary realisation – or recognise that such an object is by no means lost at all, and that its possession is not subjective but intrinsically collective.

Though Stolze goes some way to outline an individual ethics of fortitude, at best this only assists us in our singular ability to resist, rather than our collective capacity to revolt. It is apt that he draws on Simon Critchley in discussing anger as the ‘first political emotion’.⁶³ Critchley’s ethics of political resistance is premised entirely on disappointment, that ‘we inhabit a violently *unjust* world’ whose ‘hard reality’ must be faced.⁶⁴ Resistance therefore consists in the non-violent creation of an ‘interstitial distance from the state’ in which critique and the vague construction of new political subjectivities is undertaken, under the premise that the impoverished global proletariat is no longer a relevant historical actor.⁶⁵ What this ‘interstitial critique’ and ‘infinite demands on the state’ actually involve is not clear, but Critchley provides a firmer foundation for it in a separate discussion of Kierkegaard and religious faith, wherein it is ‘the faithless who can best sustain the rigor of faith without requiring security,

⁶² Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XIV*, ed. and trans. by J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 2001), p. 243.

⁶³ Stolze, ‘An Ethics for Marxism’, p. 567; Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 130.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 124, 132.

guarantees, and rewards'.⁶⁶ Resistance becomes an ethical outlook premised on resignation, wherein revolution becomes the stuff of disappointed faith, a means of perseverance in an evil world.

This premise also grounds Howard Caygill's otherwise excellent study of political resistance, wherein 'the capacity to resist' is made 'distinct from the revolutionary project of realizing freedom'.⁶⁷ Caygill distrusts its pragmatic ends-driven nature, preferring a disillusioned and vitalistic resistance of *energeia* that opposes all forms of domination.⁶⁸ In its rarefied, politically detached form, resistance is a 'vital capacity' of life over death and an 'empowering non-violent interruption of these routines of evil'.⁶⁹ Resistance therefore becomes a question of the subject's endurance in the world. Being 'merely driven by matter's aimless energy' in an unruly world, such quietism might find more solace in the work of pessimistic philosopher and Thatcherite John Gray, abandoning the dream of collective struggle as the road to Stalinist serfdom, and retreating into the safe solipsism of 'inner freedom'.⁷⁰ Indeed, why maintain political beliefs at all, if individual freedom and life is all one can truly count on? Berlant helpfully defines as 'cruel optimism' those desires and attachments that actually impede one's happiness and flourishing.⁷¹ Like her examples of binge eating, filial duty or participation in the broken forms of a sham representative democracy, might the project of collective power and revolution merely be a 'fantasy' and optimistic attachment that enables us to persist in a passive state under neoliberal capitalism?⁷² In this case, Caygill's endorsement of disillusion need not be so disillusioning.

For those brutalised by capitalism, bigotry, patriarchy, state violence

⁶⁶ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 252.

⁶⁷ Howard Caygill, *On Resistance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 146.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20.

⁷⁰ John Gray, *The Soul of the Marionette* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), pp. 163-5.

⁷¹ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, pp. 1-2.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 11-4, 224-6.

or racism, or determined to express solidarity with and defend those who are, one needs more than ethical persistence. There remains a need for a political theory that indicates how commonly-held grievances can be manifested in collective forms that become powerful and empowering, transforming repressive social institutions and retaking state power from the grip of these forces. There is however one means of overcoming these debilitating consequences, drawing a line out of the impasse of ethical resistance towards a thinking of collective power, one that faces the voluntary servitude that makes ‘some fight for their servitude as if for salvation’,⁷³ and enables a becoming freer at the immanent level of desire and the imagination.

3. Emulation

There were two textual problems with Matheron’s account of indignation alluded to earlier. The first concerns fear. It is not strictly consistent with Spinoza to claim that the subject will react to the tyrant’s violence which causes her/him fear with anger and hatred. As Spinoza argues, it is fear of isolation that compels a subject to ally with others in a civil state, and a common fear shared that, like hope, enables a multitude to think as if by one mind.⁷⁴ Fear, like hope, compels the subject to obey, or follow others who obey, and so is more likely to condition obedience. The second concerns the passive affects. Being not only a passive affect but also a sad affect, indignation can only cause harm to the subject who experiences it: E4p51 states that it is an ‘evil’ and a cause of further passivity, and 4p73 finds no place for it in the life of the individual guided by reason. At the same time, 4p54 remarks that while the passive sad affects of ‘repentance’ and ‘humility’ are not virtues but failures to adequately grasp one’s power and desire, they serve a socially instrumental use. Given that in Spinoza’s

⁷³ TTP pref.10. For Deleuze and Guattari, this is the ‘fundamental problem of political philosophy’ – *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 42.

⁷⁴ TP 3.3; 3.8; 6.1-2.

schema those who live according to the dictates of reason are very few indeed, ‘since men must sin, they ought rather to sin in that direction’.⁷⁵ Of course, no-one willingly elects this affective pair. Instead it is through prophets who, having ‘considered the common advantage’, commend these affects, alongside hope and fear, because those who are ‘subject to these affects can be guided far more easily... [to] live from the guidance of reason’.

Indignation is not one of these affects (nor is it, technically, one of the given imitative affects). While it may serve a politically instrumental use in establishing solidarity and energising a people to overthrow a tyrant and change the state’s form, there is nothing about it that will necessarily foster a sense of collectivity beyond the point of observing the injury to another we judge of like nature. It led to the ‘imprudence’ of the English republican regicides of the Civil War, whose replacement of one prince with another Spinoza had little time for. Once the injury ends, so does the indignation, and so the insurrectionaries return home, some possibly repentant. Instead, there is another affect of resistance that may animate the politics of collective desire, without the textual or political problems above, and that is emulation.

Emulation is defined as ‘a desire for a thing which is generated in us because we imagine that others have the same desire’.⁷⁶ It is also one of the imitative affects, but specifically imitates what is judged to be ‘honourable, useful or pleasant’. Emulation emerges from the primary affect of desire,⁷⁷ and so is neither joyous nor sad, but the only affect of desire that is also imitative. Imagining others sharing the same desire results in ‘undoing the divide between ego-centrism and altruism’ as Jason Read puts it, revealing the necessarily relational or, for him, transindividual nature of the affects.⁷⁸ At the same time, emulation is not intrinsically empowering – the desire

⁷⁵ E4p54s.

⁷⁶ E3ad33; cf. 3p27s.

⁷⁷ E3p11s.

⁷⁸ Jason Read, *The Politics of Transindividuality* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 30-1; cf. Matheron, *Individu*, p. 164.

we imagine could be a harmful one, or we might seek to repress a given desire to conform with others with reactionary beliefs – but it redirects attention to the fundamental role of the imagination in forging lastingly powerful collectives. If we emulate what we judge to be of a common nature, then the question of any project of collective empowerment becomes how we are to extend our imagination of what is common with us, our *commonality*.

Spinoza provides no ready answer here, though the proximate affects offer more illumination. If someone affects another judged like us with joy, we are affected with love towards them, that is, joy accompanied by the idea of an external cause.⁷⁹ Inversely, if this same person affects another like us in a way that causes them suffering, we are affected with sadness for the victim, and hatred for this person.⁸⁰ This sadness compels us to ‘free a thing we pity from its suffering’, resulting either in the destruction of this person, or another desire to do a good for the thing we pity, which Spinoza calls ‘benevolence’,⁸¹ one of Bove’s affects of resistance earlier. For Spinoza, our internal affective structure is most often defined by our relations to those around us. We strive to accomplish whatever we imagine others to look on with joy, which leads to ‘ambition’;⁸² and if we believe that our actions have caused others joy, we experience ‘self-esteem’.⁸³ If we imagine others loving, desiring or hating the same object in the same way that we do, we experience our own affect with greater intensity and constancy,⁸⁴ and by the same token, the greater the affect by which we imagine a thing we love to be affected toward us, the greater joy or self-esteem we ourselves experience.⁸⁵

One can now identify some foundations for a project of collective

⁷⁹ E3p27c1; 3p13c.

⁸⁰ 3p27c2-3, drawing on 3p22s.

⁸¹ 3p27s2.

⁸² 3p29s.

⁸³ 3p30s.

⁸⁴ 3p31.

⁸⁵ 3p34s.

empowerment through the affects: by emulation we desire a common good, because we imagine others like ourselves desiring it. In extending our concept of a common nature towards as many as we can, we feel love for those who bring joy to our friends, and in expressing this love, thereby increase our circle of friends. We care for and defend our friends who are injured, benevolently seeking to restore their power, and possibly revenging those who have injured them as our enemies. Our ambitious desire to accomplish things that cause others joy, that is, which empowers them, will also lead to a feeling of self-esteem when we recognise our worth in enabling others. And when we imagine our friends loving and desiring the same ideas and activities that we do, we love them with even greater constancy, renewing our commitment and solidarity in this collective flourishing.

However, there is nothing yet to prevent emulation becoming envy,⁸⁶ ambition leading to mutual strife or possessive greed,⁸⁷ and love or desire from being disappointed or spurned,⁸⁸ returning us back to solipsism, isolation and merely ethical resistance. The politicisation of the imitative affects faces the problem of what Alex Williams calls ‘negative solidarity’ – a collective sense of indignation that reacts to say workers’ strikes, wage freezes, loss of social security or protected rights for refugees with a kind of disempowered, sad commonality: ‘because I must endure increasingly austere working conditions [...] then everyone else must too’.⁸⁹ Emulation can work both ways: one judged like us may get no sympathy whatsoever for their indignation and anger, because we ourselves have endured similar sad affects. Berlant would call it a form of ‘cruel optimism’ again: as we struggle to persist in individualised, meritocratic fantasies of the lucky,

⁸⁶ 3p22.

⁸⁷ 3p31-p32.

⁸⁸ 3p35.

⁸⁹ Alex Williams, ‘On Negative Solidarity and Post-Fordist Plasticity’. *Splintering Bone Ashes*, 31 January 2010. <https://splinteringboneashes.blogspot.co.uk/2010/01/negative-solidarity-and-post-fordist.html>. [URL accessed 30.10.18]

rewarded life, so those that complain about a rigged game are subject to ridicule and resentment, and structural injustices little more than individual ‘bad luck’ cases.⁹⁰

In her more sympathetic study of working class supporters of the American Right, Arlie Russell Hochschild draws our attention to the ‘deep story’ (or shared imaginary) of a collectively-weakened people. As social and economic conditions worsen for most, many see themselves as waiting in a long, slow-moving line. By working hard, paying taxes and not challenging the status quo, they expect to be duly rewarded by the American Dream, ‘the goal of everyone waiting in line’,⁹¹ but ahead, immigrants, ethnic minorities and benefits scroungers are presented (by a powerful right-wing media) as cutting the queue, sanctioned, if not encouraged, by the federal government. If ‘it’s people like *you* who have made this country great’,⁹² so the disenchanted collective imaginary goes, then at some point emulation requires others not being subject to sympathy and solidarity, but passive or outright hostility. It is akin to the previously discussed ‘frenzy of self-conceit’ in Hegel.

Spinoza earlier praised prophets for deploying the sad affects of repentance and humility to make others live by the guidance of reason (following 4p54s), and so it is remarkable that he did not write of the joyous affects they are paired with also being deployed in pursuit of the same. Where repentance is first defined, it is merely the saddened obverse of ‘self-esteem’, that is, ‘joy accompanied by the idea of an internal cause’.⁹³ Likewise, whereas humility is sadness ‘accompanied by the idea of our own weakness’,⁹⁴ joy accompanied by our power of acting is ‘self-love’ or, again, ‘self-esteem’. Yet Spinoza then claims that our observation of

⁹⁰ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 10.

⁹¹ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land. Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: New Press, 2016), p. 136.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁹³ E3p30s.

⁹⁴ 3p55s1.

another's power of acting inclines us to hate or envy them unless we judge them either as an equal or irredeemably superior to us.⁹⁵ If we venerate another because of their prudence and strength of character, this is only because we cannot imagine their virtues to be of a nature common with ours, 'any more than we envy trees their height, or lions their strength'.

It is unfortunate that Spinoza does not consider his active affects of fortitude,⁹⁶ courage and generosity as necessarily encouraging of others to emulate them. Had he done so, he might have presented an account of a collective figurehead like the prophet who does not merely mobilise through sad passive affects like fear, repentance and humility, but also through the affective powers of self-esteem, courage, generosity, fortitude, the cultural processes underlying commonality, and the passive affects of ambition, pity, love and emulation. Such a figure would thereby empower a community more than the prophet who merely mobilises through sadness. As Spinoza deduces, joy is stronger than sadness in that it involves passing to a state of greater power,⁹⁷ while knowledge alone is insufficient to overcome the affects – only a stronger affect can overcome an existing one.⁹⁸

But could a singular individual fulfil the exacting standards of such a 'prophet'? Spinoza's own hesitation about the contemporary use of true prophets and shared imaginaries reflects not only his context, but also a disdain for resting hopes on any human being. 'I know that I am human, and I may have erred', he repeats in the TTP.⁹⁹ But what if this prophet were not one but many, a 'singular plural', as Del Lucchese puts it, after Jean-Luc Nancy?¹⁰⁰ For the prophet is simply one with the capability of grasping reasonable ways of living, which they then relay to other

⁹⁵ 3p55s2.

⁹⁶ E3p59s.

⁹⁷ E3p21.

⁹⁸ E4p7, 4p14, 4p18.

⁹⁹ TTP pref.25, 20.47.

¹⁰⁰ Del Lucchese, *Conflict, Power, and Multitude*, p. 138.

individuals through the persuasive means of the affects and imagination in a way the majority can understand.¹⁰¹ By implication, anyone capable of persuading others to live peacefully and cooperatively together through affective, symbolic or imaginary registers that they can not only grasp but come to incorporate as their own – thereby recognising their own common nature and refusing to tolerate external oppression – might be termed a prophet. The means of educating the desire of individuals to extend commonality, emulate what is best in others, act and think as a collective group with each other, and then act as if by one mind according to reason, falls not to one prophet, but a collective prophet. Such a prophet might be reconceived by a collective noun well-known, but worth exploring in a more disruptive, collectivising light – *the People*.

4. Positive Depersonalisation

It sometimes seems that a virtuous, quietist, often wholly ethical (and therefore individual) call for resistance is the order of the day. While many of us may talk hard about the problems of contemporary capitalism, it's often alongside a more withdrawn and private amplification of one's productivity at work. There is a common feeling of fear that all will be taken away if we do not work hard enough, thereby cutting down time to play, collaborate or conspire with others of a common nature, as the accumulation of private capital continues unimpeded.

If previous collective forms can teach us anything, it is that their contagious motivation and joy only comes into being amid participating in their activity. There is no intrinsic guarantee that they will remain consistently egalitarian (that is, if they start so) or that they will succeed or fail in their avowed goals. But collective desire is immanent, never teleological. It acts out of solidarity with others, and is constituted by these first, real affective bonds – not transcendent and promethean ambitions of total class uniformity, of changing *everything, forever*. As Mark Fisher put

¹⁰¹ Cf. TTP Pref.10; 2.9.

it, it is about ‘positive depersonalisation’,¹⁰² overcoming what Walter Benjamin saw as the ‘phantasmagoria’ of individualised outlooks.¹⁰³ Through sharing our feelings and experiences of contemporary capitalism together, we become more aware not just of ourselves and each other, but also that the solutions to our problems must lie beyond our individual selves. ‘No individuals can change anything, not even themselves’, Fisher wrote, ‘but collective activation is already, immanently, overcoming individualised immiseration’.

It is a case of finding spaces of collective enjoyment, care and fellowship, ones which preserve not only our own mental and physical power but directly nourish others around us. Collective desire is all about ‘making hope practical, rather than despair convincing’ as Raymond Williams memorably wrote, or, in Antonio Gramsci’s words, of a ‘pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will’.¹⁰⁴ Fellowship, friendship and love are the glue of common association, the feeling and result of being among those of a common nature. Such a ‘commons’ is not rooted in crude cultural norms of ‘nature’, be it race or gender, but in a shared imaginary and sense of what is common to all, a sense which by the guidance of reason becomes universal, tolerant, peaceable and egalitarian. Even in difficult times, the care, fellowship, solidarity and open thinking that we share together is of critical importance, even if it is insufficient to overthrow oppressive forces in itself. This sense collectively empowers and helps transform affects of anger and indignation into ones of joy, emulation and lasting hope.

Hence, in an ethics for militants, these affirmative values are essential, and should be actively cultivated, protected and valued over points of

¹⁰² Fisher, “Abandon hope”, *k-punk*.

¹⁰³ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), p. 390.

¹⁰⁴ Williams, *Resources of Hope*, ed. Robin Gable (London: Verso, 1989), p. 209; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1992), p. 175.

doctrinal conformity. 'To do all we can do', as Deleuze polemically draws out as Spinoza's prime ethical instruction, is always already a collective activity.¹⁰⁵ This collective desire for freedom, this 'communism of minds', can intersect with the desires of an individual. Fortitude, friendship, courage, solidarity and love are the means by which both the individual *and* collective stay alive, resist and revolt against the saddened passive affects and isolation of the contemporary conjuncture.

¹⁰⁵ Deleuze, *Expressionism*, p. 269.